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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to provide a comparison of primary/elementary teachers' perceptions in Australia and the United States of the skills, competencies, and behavioral attributes that principals should possess to administer an effective school. Utilizing the Audit of Principal Effectiveness, 140 primary teachers in Australia and 347 elementary teachers in the United States rank ordered an 80-item validated questionnaire according to the degree of importance each item had as it related to principal/administrator effectiveness. A 9-point Likert scale assisted the subjects to rank order the first 79 statements. Item 80 consisted of an overall rating. The items were grouped into three domains and nine factors. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess response differentiation. Significant differences were found for all nine factors, with 14 items contributing most to the differences observed. The differences are partially explained by variation in organizational structure. The Australian system of primary education is characterized by central control at the state level. Control of elementary education in the U.S. is decentralized at the school and district level. Consequently, the Australian principal has less autonomy because autonomy is shared to a greater extent with other professionals, especially at the system level. Because of the principal's place in the educational structure in Australia, greater attention is devoted to organizational procedures and teacher relations. (JAM)

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF PRIMARY/ELEMENTARY TEACHERS OF PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS IN AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED STATES

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF PRIMARY/ELEMENTARY TEACHERS OF PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS IN AUSTRALIA AND THE UNITED STATES

ABSTRACT

The quality of primary/elementary education remains high on the national agenda in Australia and the United States. Research evidence has documented the critical role the principal plays in determining the effectiveness and the quality of the educational program.

This paper compares perceptions of primary/elementary teachers in Australia and the United States about the behaviors/skills utilized by principals which create a better working and learning environment. Utilizing the Audit of Principal Effectiveness significant differences were found for all nine factors with 14 items contributing most to the differences observed. The differences are partially explained by variation in organizational structure.

INTRODUCTION

The literature on organizations over the past several years has documented the emerging consensus of the organizational characteristics and conditions that are associated with organizational achievement or effectiveness. [1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8.]

Astuto and Clark [9] argued that this consensus comprises "eight dimensions of preference in the choice of organizational strategy for retaining or attaining effectiveness." On a daily basis managers are confronted with choices which, taken in sum, determine the likely effectiveness of both the manager and the organization. Astuto and Clark conclude that the effective leader emphasizes:

activity (rather than stability)

distinction (rather than intention)

variability (rather than regularity)

efficacy (rather than accountability)

facilitation (rather than intervention)

empowerment (rather than control)

desegregation (rather than holism)

effectiveness (rather than efficiency)

The educational administration literature highlights the critical role educational leaders play in determining the levels and quality of the process and outcomes within educational institutions. In their Portrait of an Effective School Purkey and Smith [10] identified nine Organiational/Structural variables and four Process/Form variables important to the operation of an effective school. Variables of particular relevance to this study were school-site management (autonomy), leadership of the principal, district level support, collaborative planning, commonly shared goals and high expectations. These findings confirmed Austin's [11] earlier enumeration of the characteristics of effective schools which included, inter alia: strong principal leadership, principal participation in the classroom instructional program; higher expectations on the part of the principal for student and teacher performance advancement; and principal control over the functioning of the school, the curriculum and program, and their staff. Similar findings have been reported by Berlin [12], Mackenzie [13] and Edmonds [14].

More specifically, various authors have examined the role of the principal and the administrative skills and behaviors which contributed to school effectiveness. For example, Rutherford synthesized research findings and suggested effective principals should have five essential qualities: 1. have clear, informed visions of what they want their schools to become - visions that focus on students and their needs; 2. translate these visions into goals for their schools and expectations for the teachers, students and administrators; 3. establish school climates that support progress toward these goals and expectations; 4. continuously monitor progress; and 5. intervene in a supportive or corrective manner, when this seems necessary. (15)

Klopf, Scheldon and Brennan reported that an effective principal is easy to spot because of the overall effectiveness of the school. Furthermore, they suggested that an effective school is seen as an optimum learning environment, one that nurtures the cognitive, affective, social and aesthetic development of its pupils. Thus the goal of the principal should be to develop such an environment. (16)

Chapman indicated the role of the school principal would evolve and become relocated from the apex of the pyramid to the centre of a network of human relations. Furthermore, she postulated the principal must be a co-ordinator of a number of people, representing different interest groups among the school community who, together, will determine the direction the school is to follow. (17)

Robinson (18) reported that the Effective School Principal was goal and task oriented, well organized, conveyed high expectations, had well defined guidelines, made frequent class visits, was highly visible, was available to visit with students and staff, provided strong support for teachers, was adept at parent and community relations, and played an assertive instructional role.

Duignan argued that the changing organizational context is likely to have a considerable impact on the role of educational administrators in the future: special skills will be required of those who wish to discharge the responsibility of the role effectively. The most important skills stressed by Duignan include the management of knowledge, the management of information, the management of expertise, the management of change, and the management of self and others. (19)

The staff and leadership (20) development research has documented the importance of providing feedback to the principal from multiple perspectives about skills and behaviors. Several feedback instruments exist which have been utilized to provide data about principal performance and effectiveness. The Audit of Principal Effectiveness (21), developed by Bowman and Valentine, is a comprehensive instrument developed over 15 years from extensive experience with administrator evaluations.

While feedback about administrator performance is important, consideration must also be given to the organizational context in which the school is situated and functions.

This study was undertaken in order to provide a comparison of primary teachers' perceptions in Australia and the United States of the skills, competencies and attributes which principals should possess to administer an effective school. Of equal concern, if differences in perceptions were observed between Australian and United States teachers, can these differences be explained in terms of system and structural peculiarities of the two quite different educational systems.

METHODOLOGY

The Audit of Principal Effectiveness, an 80 item validated questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 347 elementary teachers in the United States and 140 primary teachers in Australia. The items are grouped into three Domains and nine Factors as shown in Table 1. All the items included in the instrument were selected following two trials in the United States in which teachers were asked to rank 164 items according to the degree of importance of each item as it related to the effectiveness of principals.

TABLE 1

DOMAINS, FACTORS AND ITEMS IN THE AUDIT OF PRINCIPAL EFFECTIVENESS (a)

DOMAIN	FACTORS Item #'s in Parenthesis	FACTOR MEANS AUST.	U.S.
1. ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT			
[The principal understands the direction the school needs to take and uses organizational procedures appropriately to ensure the school operates smoothly]	1. Organizational Direction (1-7)	7.40	7.62
	2. Organizational Linkage (8-18)	6.11	7.38
	3. Organizational Procedures (19-27)	7.69	7.33
2. ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT			
[Through effective managerial and organizational procedures, and the principals work with teachers and students a positive organizational environment is created.]	4. Teacher Relations (28-40)	8.01	7.46
	5. Student Relations (41-48)	7.53	7.54
	6. Interactive Processes (49-57)	7.53	7.62
	7. Affective Processes (58-64)	7.00	7.18
3. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM			
[The principal works with teachers to help them improve the quality of instruction.]	8. Instructional Improvement (65-72)	7.28	7.47
	9. Curriculum Improvement (73-79)	6.48	7.29

(a) A detailed description of the Domains, Factors and Items may be obtained from the authors.

In their responses, teachers reported their perceptions of the effectiveness of the principal for each of the 79 statements on a 9-point Likert scale where 1-represented "not effective" and 9-, "very effective."

Item 80 was an overall rating of principal effectiveness which was not included in this study since it is not appropriate for an item analysis of what teachers perceive to be the qualities and characteristics of an effective principal.

RESULTS

The standard statistical method of comparison of results for two groups (Australian teachers and American teachers) in response to the same instrument would be to conduct univariate t-tests to determine whether there are significant differences between means for the factors and domains. However, in this study it was important to discover which individual items contributed to any differences in perceptions held by the two groups of teachers. For such an analysis, the univariate t-test has a limitation because the performance of multiple t-tests compounds the probability of making a type I (α) error. (22) Notwithstanding these limitations univariate tests were conducted and the results are reported in Table 1. By way of comparison, it is interesting to note that the univariate test identified significant differences between Australian and United States teachers on Domains 1 and 3 and Factors 2, 4 and 9.

TABLE 2

UNIVARIATE T-TESTS FOR DOMAINS AND FACTORS

Domain or Factor		t-value	Significance of t
Domain 1		-2.94	$p < .05$
Factor	1	1.53	$p = .128$
	2	8.88	$p < .00005$
	3	2.36	$p = .019$
Domain 2		0.60	$p = .548$
Factor	4	3.55	$p < .00005$
	5	0.04	$p = .965$
	6	0.63	$p = .526$
	7	1.09	$p = .277$
Domain 3		-3.57	$p < .05$
Factor	8	1.16	$p = .247$
	9	4.85	$p < .00005$

To overcome this limitation, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted using Hotellings T^2. This procedure maximizes the difference between the two sets of data and provides a more sensitive detection of differences between item means. Significant differences were found between the two groups for all domains and factors when the more sensitive test was performed. The results for the MANOVA are reported in Table 3.

TABLE 3

HOTELLINGS T^2 FOR DOMAINS AND FACTORS, AND STRUCTURE COEFFICIENTS FOR APE ITEMS. AUSTRALIA AND U.S. DATA.

DOMAIN/ FACTOR	T	Approx. F	Sign. F	Items contributing most variance	
				Item	Structure Coefficient (r^2)
DOMAIN 1	.6610	92.7635	$p < .00005$		
FACTOR 1	.1324	8.9052	$p < .00005$	1	.2747
FACTOR 2	.8436	33.1287	$p < .00005$	14	.3623
				15	.3049
FACTOR 3	.1735	8.6339	$p < .00005$	19	.3013
DOMAIN 2	.1716	18.8729	$p < .00005$		
FACTOR 4	.1714	6.0518	$p < .00005$	29	.2979
				30	.4078
				31	.2775
FACTOR 5	.1512	8.8082	$p < .00005$	43	.1169
FACTOR 6	.1287	6.6043	$p < .00005$	53	.1377
FACTOR 7	.1768	11.4667	$p < .00005$	62	.3136
DOMAIN 3	.1150	25.3548	$p < .00005$		
FACTOR 8	.2654	14.8947	$p < .00005$	68	.7175
				72	.6914
FACTOR 9	.2592	16.7709	$p < .00005$	77	.5055
				78	.3605

DISCUSSION

The items identified as contributing most to the difference between Australian and United States teachers' perceptions of principal effectiveness are discussed. Mean scores for the Domains and Factors are shown in Table I and Structure Coefficients for significant items are reported in Table 2. Mean scores for items contributing most to factor differences are reported in the text.

The Organizational Development domain consists of three factors. United States teachers perceive their principals as being more effective for the factors of Organizational Direction and Organizational Linkage while the Australians perceive their principals as being more effective on Organizational Procedures. The item that contributed most to the difference in Organizational Direction was Item 1, "The principal assists the faculty in developing an understanding of and support for the beliefs and attitudes which forms the basis of the educational value system of the school" [Australian mean = 6.71, U.S. = 7.46].

The difference expressed here would appear to be consistent with the notion the principal in the United States has greater autonomy. Because a great deal is controlled at the system level in Australia, educational values tend to be set at that level, which means the Australian principal is normally expected to uphold those values. The United States principal, on the other hand, is required to develop a value system for the school and with this responsibility there is an obligation to help teachers understand the values and to build support for them.

On the Organizational Linkage factor two items contributed the most to the significance difference. Item 14, "The principal invests time with district office and other external agencies to obtain support and resources from the agencies" [A = 5.30, U.S. = 7.43]; and Item 15, "The principal strives to achieve autonomy for the school" [A = 5.55, U.S. = 7.44]. With respect to item 14, the vast majority of support and resources for the operation of the Australian school is supplied by the State Department of Education and while school fund raising for special events is quite common there is little need for the Australian principal to seek support from external agencies. By contrast, the American school is supported and resourced by local tax collections which places a greater onus on the principal to develop a support base in the community. As far as item 15 is concerned the United States school system is based on local control and so considerable powers devolve to the school principal. The principal is responsible for recruitment, evaluation and where necessary termination of employment of teachers, curriculum development, and student personnel procedures, all of which contribute to the building of autonomy at the school level. By contrast, the functions listed above are carried out at the system level in Australia, and indeed, the philosophy of having common practices across a state-system encourages schools to "look alike" and discourages the building of autonomy at the school level.

The item which contributed most to the difference on the factor Organizational Procedures was Item 19, "During the identification of needed change, the principal's style is more supportive and participative than directive and authoritative" [A = 8.19, U.S. = 7.32]. This result was somewhat surprising since theory (10,18) would suggest that the more autonomous principal's style should reflect the supportive and participative dimension. Perhaps the result can be explained in terms of the locus of change. In Australia, change is generally imposed on the school from without, usually as a system-wide directive. Under such conditions the Australian principal is also affected and so may more easily align with the teachers in a supportive and participatory manner. By contrast, change in U.S. schools is often introduced by the principal, and the principal, as the change agent may therefore be viewed as more directive and authoritative.

Four factors comprise the domain "Organizational Environment." Australian teachers perceived their principals as being more effective for the factor of Teacher Relations and three items contributed to the significant difference observed. Item 29, "The principal is perceptive of teacher needs" [A = 8.11, U.S. = 7.13]; Item 30, "The principal gives teachers the support they need to be effective" [A = 8.42, U.S. = 7.32]; and Item 31, "The principal diagnoses the causes of conflict and successfully mediates or arbitrates conflict situations" [A = 7.84, U.S. = 6.93]. The finding for item 29 was also unanticipated, however it is probably accurate to assert that the United States principal is largely responsible for meeting teacher needs and so when these fall short of expectations teachers focus their dissatisfactions at the building level. On the other hand, the Australian principal must often address teacher needs through a higher authority. Consequently, any dissatisfaction is likely to be directed to the authorities beyond the school. For item 30, Australian principals may well be viewed as giving support in the battle against an unsympathetic "head office." The focus, then, for any dissatisfaction is directed beyond the school. By contrast, the U.S. principal is ultimately responsible for teacher support and so any perceived deficiencies are directed towards the principal. With respect to item 31, it would seem logical to suggest that the principal with greater autonomy would have greater flexibility in resolving conflict through mediation. However it may be the perception of this degree of autonomy which provides the clue to explaining this difference. In situations

where the principal is perceived as having significant decision-making power (as in the U.S.) there is the potential for greater teacher-principal conflict, and thus, some teacher dissatisfaction is to be expected.

Conversely, where the principal is perceived as having comparatively less decision-making power (Australia), conflicts are more likely to be teacher-teacher and in such circumstances the principal can adopt the comparatively objective role of impartial observer in analyzing and arbitrating the conflict. Consequently the Australian principal is perceived as more effective in conflict resolution since the principal is less likely to have a personal stake in the outcome.

Overall, on the factor "Student Relations" United States teachers perceive their principals as being more effective. However, of the eight items related to this factor, U.S. teachers perceived their principal as being more effective on five items, and Australian teachers perceived their principals as being more effective on three items. The two items which contributed most to the U.S. teachers perceiving their principals as more effective were, Item 48, "The principal enjoys working with students" [A = 7.676, U.S. = 7.83] and Item 44, "The principal encourages student leadership" [A = 7.29, U.S. = 7.47]. Item 43, "Students in the school view the principal as a leader of school spirit" [A = 7.80, U.S. = 7.30] was the most significant item on which Australian teachers viewed their principals as being more effective. This is partially explained by different traditions in the two countries, especially the wearing of school uniforms, formalized inter-school sports and regular whole-school assemblies, all of which are more common in Australia than the United States. These factors can contribute significantly to the building of school spirit because they provide for a sense of recognition and group identity.

On the factor Interactive Processes, U.S. teachers perceived their principals as being more effective. Item 53, "The principal develops appropriate rules and procedures" [A = 7.21, U.S. = 7.71] was identified as contributing most to this difference. This is probably attributable to the idea that while there is some freedom to develop individual school rules and procedures in Australia, the major rules and procedures are determined system-wide. Consequently, the Australian principal has less of a role to play than the U.S. principal who must develop appropriate rules and procedures for the individual school. U.S. teachers also perceive their principals as being more effective for the factor Affective Processes, and Item 62, "The principal shares personal feelings and opinions about school issues with teachers" [A = 6.47, U.S. = 7.46]

was the major distinguishing feature. Part of this difference may be explained by cultural differences as Americans tend to be very open about expressing feelings and opinions. More likely however, is that the school structure has an impact on this item. Since most school issues are resolved at the system level in Australia, there is less demand on the principal to share personal opinions. However, in the U.S. school issues are debated at the local level and it becomes important for the principal to test ideas and share thoughts with the school faculty.

Two factors are included in the domain Educational Programs. U.S. teachers perceived their principals as being more effective on Instructional Improvement. Two items, Item 68, "The principal actively and regularly participates in the observation and assessment of classroom instruction, including teaching strategies and student learning" [A = 6.47, U.S. = 7.29]; and Item 72, "The principal is committed to instructional improvement" [A = 7.34, U.S. = 7.98] accounted for the significant differences on this factor. With respect to Item 68, the different school systems provide the clue to explaining this difference. While Australian principals certainly participate in classroom activities they do so in a different context from their U.S. counterparts. This requirement is written in to the U.S. principal's job description and assumes major importance since the principal is responsible for the hiring, evaluating and firing of teachers. The Australian principal is one of a team of assessors of teacher performance and the responsibility for teacher employment rests at the system level. Thus there is an administrative burden on the U.S. principal in addition to the professional responsibilities assumed by both groups of principals.

As far as Item 72 is concerned, with the reality of a core curriculum in Australian schools, the principal's role in instructional improvement is somewhat constrained. In contrast there is instructional autonomy at the building level in the U.S. where the principal is responsible for curriculum development and implementation, and often, textbook selection. The Australian teachers' perceptions of principals commitment to instructional improvement could be affected by the involvement of other professionals in the process. Finally, U.S. teachers perceived their principals as being more effective for the factor of Curriculum Improvement. The result for Item 77, "The principal uses objective data such as test scores to make changes in curriculum and staffing" [A = 5.44, U.S. = 7.02] is consistent with the previous item

related to the U.S. principal's responsibility for both curriculum issues and teacher employment. Objective data then become important criteria for the U.S. principals in their decision making.

Australian principals are not responsible for curriculum changes and have a minimal role in staffing. In addition the Australian principal operates in an environment increasingly characterized by an "anti-testing" sentiment. In relation to Item 78, "The principal has a systematic process for program review and change" [A = 5.72, U.S. = 7.07], program review and change is promoted at the system level in Australia and so principals are generally recipients, rather than initiators, of program review. In the United States program review devolves on the school and the principal is responsible for the process and the implementation of change even if the impetus for this review comes from the district, state, or federal level.

CONCLUSION

The Australian system of primary education is characterized by central control at the state level. Control of elementary education in the United Sates is decentralized at the school, and district level.

These structural differences, with few exceptions, would appear to account for the differences in principal effectiveness as perceived by Australian and United States teachers and identified in the analysis of the data.

The greater autonomy of the principal in the United States results in different emphases being placed on certain aspects of the principal's role, most notably in organizational direction and linkage, student relations, interactive and affective processes, and instructional and curriculum improvement.

In many respects the Australian principal has less autonomy in these processes because the responsibility is shared to a greater extent with other professionals, especially at the system level. Because of the principal's place in the educational structure in Australia, greater attention is devoted to organizational procedures and teacher relations.

It can be concluded from these results that the Audit of Principal Effectiveness is a valid instrument for assessing principal effectiveness, provided system and structural peculiarities are taken into account. The data should provide useful information for principals not only on a comparative basis, but also as a guide to enhancing their effectiveness as leaders of schools.

Promising areas for future research might involve a comparison of the effectiveness of Australia and U.S. schools with a view to testing Astuto and Clark's (9) eight dimensions of preference in the choice of organizational strategy for retaining or attaining effectiveness, or the structural and process variables identified by Purkey and Smith (10) in "A Portrait of an Effective School."

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